

“LOVE & CARE” INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Noel Jones¹, C.R.H. Gigante McBain², and
Shannon Madden³

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เป็นการศึกษาสิ่งที่กลุ่มอาจารย์และนักศึกษาของมหาวิทยาลัยอัสสัมชัญสามารถประสบความสำเร็จโดยใช้น้ำใจหรือความเมตตาที่มีต่อผู้ที่คอยโอกาสในระดับที่เหมาะสม คือการช่วยเหลือนักเรียนชาวพม่าตามโรงเรียนชายแดน นักเรียนเหล่านี้เข้ามาประเทศไทยเพื่อเพิ่มโอกาสทางการศึกษาให้กับตนเองทั้งในระดับประถมศึกษาและมัธยมศึกษา อย่างไรก็ตาม การช่วยเหลือครั้งนี้ไม่ได้เกี่ยวกับการศึกษาเท่านั้นแต่ยังเป็นการพัฒนาสุขภาพและการให้คำแนะนำเกี่ยวกับโภชนาการ รวมทั้งการตรวจสอบสุขภาพนักเรียนทั้งหมดและการให้คำแนะนำทางการแพทย์เกี่ยวกับการสวัสดิการทางการรักษาพยาบาล นอกจากนี้ได้มีการริเริ่มโครงการเมล็ดพันธุ์พืชเพื่อที่นักเรียนเหล่านั้นจะได้ปลูกพืชผักของตนเองเพื่อเสริม โภชนาการและใช้เป็นอาหาร

¹Dr. Jones is currently a Visiting Professor at Graduate School of Business, Assumption University of Thailand, where he has been teaching for the past ten years. He holds degrees in Biology, International Development, and a Ph.D. in Management and Psychology, and has published books and articles in the fields of Management, Psychology, Education and ICT. Over a period of 14 years from 1987, Dr. Noel Jones worked as an International Monetary Fund staff member - responsible for Management and Organization Development, and at the World Bank where he specialized in Strategic Planning and Organizational Change. His consulting experience extends across the Private Sector, Infrastructure, Health, Education, and Environment. Noel is a co-founder and Chairman of VoxWorld Foundation. He is currently on the Editorial Board of the ABAC Journal and the Assumption University Graduate School of Business e-Journal.

²Dr. C. Gigante MacBain, MMMI, holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Aberdeen University, Scotland, U.K. Currently he is teaching in the Institute of English Language Education. His literary articles have been published in various journals worldwide, and also includes a book, “Basic Theories of Jeet Kune Do, An Introduction to its Philosophical Principles, Applied Physical Movements and Health Benefits”, published by Assumption University Press. Dr. MacBain also serves as a Senior and Founding Member of the Au Journal of Technology Editorial Board, and a Contributing Columnist and Advisor for the Au Press student newspaper.

³Shannon Madden holds a Bachelor’s degree in International Studies and Spanish from DePaul University, Chicago, IL, USA. She was a Lecturer in the Institute for English Language Education department of Assumption University from October 2008-March 2010, and recently returned to the USA to pursue a Master’s of Public Affairs and International Sustainable Development.

Abstract

This is the story of a group of foreign teachers and their students from AU can accomplish with the appropriate level of *nam jai* (น้ใจ) or compassion for those in need. It is about helping Burmese students in a border school who have come to Thailand to improve their educational opportunities for both second and third level education. However, the work involved is not just education per se but also to improve their health and give them nutritional guidance. It included a medical examination for all the students and included medical guidance on what they needed to improve their health welfare. In addition, a seed project was established so the students could grow their own vegetables to supplement their nutritional intake.

INTRODUCTION

This is an account of a group of foreign teachers working at a Thai University and their students, as they reach out to help those in need. It is an example of what can be accomplished for the many by the actions and commitment of the few. This is not a story to show how great the participants were, but rather to show all faculty and students what can be done with a little effort and good intentions or as the Buddha and Jesus would say respectively: “with pure motivation” and “with one heart and mind”.

A Chance Encounter

The story began in early 2009 when Ajarn (Professor) Noel went on a visit to Mae Sot in Tak Province of Thailand having learned about the city from his Burmese students. Mae Sot is a beautiful, complex city with a great need and appreciation for volunteers. Mae Sot is a small town in Tak Province, Thailand, right next to the Thai-Myanmar border and has the ‘Friendship

Bridge’ linking the two nations across the Moei River. Thousands of migrants and refugees in Mae Sot attempt to earn a living and protect their families from the dangerous “black zone” inside the Burmese border. While visiting the city of Mae Sot, Dr. Noel rented a bicycle to ride up into the hills to visit a Buddhist Temple. When walking around the Temple he came across a group of students who were curious about this foreigner and asked him his name, where he came from and many other questions. He learned that they were all Karen students from a nearby school called “Love and Care” School, which is situated down from the hills on the way into Mae Sot close to the police check-point. They were just out on an outing with their teacher and told Dr. Noel that they were studying English and hoped to get scholarships to study at Thai universities. They were particularly thrilled to hear he was an Ajarn at a Bangkok University, for some of them had high hopes of getting a scholarship to study there also. As is so common in Thailand and Myanmar, the students wanted to have their photo taken so Dr. Noel took many photos of

them. He then finished his Buddhist Practice and got back on his bicycle to ride back to Mae Sot. He remembered the name of the school as quite an unusual one. But he paid little further attention to this chance encounter until many months later when he was helping another Burmese student with her English Thesis for her Master's degree. She introduced Dr. Noel to Mr. Sa Shine, an Architectural student who was also connected with Love and Care School as their outreach coordinator.

Love and Care serves young adults from Karen and Shan hill tribes in Myanmar. The 15-23 year-old students who elect to stay in Thailand in an effort to complete their high school education, take the GED or prepare for college scholarship applications. Some students came to the school after the Nargis Cyclone that hit Myanmar in 2008. The Burmese educational system ends at Grade 10 and reportedly falls well below international standards. Students cross into Thailand, go directly to the school and then are generally unable to leave school grounds for fear of harassment by police or immigration authorities. Fortunately, local border control does not go to the school often although they are aware of its existence. The school uses whatever volunteer teachers they can find, most of whom are only able to stay for a month or two.



Love and Care School Donation

Mr. Sa Shine informed Dr. Noel of the student needs at the school, which included blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, sweaters, socks, sandals, school supplies and sports equipment.

Dr. Noel then launched an appeal among his colleagues and many Ajarns contributed donations in support of this worthy cause. When everything was purchased and brought to Queens Building, at the Hua Mak Campus, Dr. Noel was standing at the steps waiting for some Burmese students to arrive and help bring everything to a local Burmese house/office for storage. Then Br. Philippe arrived and asked about the many bags of clothes etc. On being told what it was all about, he too later donated to this effort. Another Ajarn (Professor), Dr. Mac, whom Dr. Noel knew from the past, arrived from his classes and he too was interested in all the bags. He too later made a donation and asked Dr. Noel if the students would be interested in some medical help as he was a lay medical missionary. They discussed this and after further exploration it led to the first medical missionary trip to Mae Sot in late January, 2010.

In the meantime, now that all the supplies were purchased, the question arose as to how to transport them to Mae Sot. Different options were explored but in the end it required hiring a van and driver to make the trip. Dr. Noel explained the situation to his Master's classes and one of his students named Khun Ball found a van and a driver who would deliver the goods on Dec 6. Mr. Ball then organized a fund raising from among the class who all contributed towards the cost of the transport. Dr. Noel mean-

while arranged with some of his students to travel with the supplies to Mae Sot and ensure that all the goods were given out to the students and staff. They were Ms. Ellen, who was from Mae Sot and also a Karen member, a graduate named Ms. Naw from Burma, and another Burmese friend Ms. Myintzu. This was a great event and the students were thrilled to receive the supplies because the weather was getting cold and they needed warm blankets at night and sweaters to wear during the mornings and evenings. They were also thrilled to receive the school supplies and the sports equipment.



The supplies arriving at Love and Care School with Ms. Ellen, Ms. Naw and Ms. Myintzu in front, with students from the school ready to unload the many bags.



Happy Love and Care School students having received their supplies, all wearing the sweaters they had received.

Medical Donation

Following the success of the first Donation trip to Mae Sot, Dr. Mac and Dr. Noel got together to arrange for a second donation of medical supplies. This was led by Dr. Mac, who recruited three other American English teachers from his dept to assist him. He met with Mr. Sa Shine and Nurse Htway, a nursing graduate from the university, who explained the medical assistance that the students at the school needed. Then two of Dr. Mac's classes raised the funds to donate medical supplies and these were purchased by Ms. Aom through her friend, Ms. Kay, a Chemist working at a Thai Government Hospital. A special ceremony was arranged by Fr. Bipin (himself a post graduate student from India) at the University Chapel to bless those donations and donors.

The medical donation trip was then arranged for the last weekend of January. Dr. Noel sourced a driver and van and dealt with the trip's logistics while Dr. Mac took care of the medical side.

Dr. Mac is a highly trained and experienced Medical General Practitioner as well as being a Psychiatrist, Clinical Psycholo-



Fr. Bipin, Dr. Mac and his students who had donated the medical supplies and Dr. Noel.

gist and martial arts specialist. Hailing from Scotland, he and Dr. Noel from Ireland got along very well as Celtic brothers. They complimented each other in many ways as will be seen below. Dr. Mac is also a Lay Brother and Administrator of the “Medical Missionaries of the Militia of the Immaculata” (MMMI), a part of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), a Franciscan lead group founded by St. Maximillian Kolbe to spread fervent love of the Blessed Virgin around the world. Dr. Mac’s Superior is V.R. Fr. Patrick Greenough, OFM Conv., in Chicago, IL, USA.

Heading North to Mae Sot

It was a beautiful Friday morning in late January when the Medical Team headed out of Bangkok for Mae Sot. Only Dr. Noel and Ajarn Shannon had previously visited Mae Sot so there were high expectations and anticipation from among the team members to see this beautiful part of Thailand. The journey was very pleasant and the countryside we passed through presented us with a wide range of lovely scenery and urban experiences as we passed through the cities of Ayutthaya, Nakhon Sawan and Tak before getting into the windy and steep twists and turns of the hill country as we got close to Mae Sot. The driver and his colleague Khun Dew were in good spirits throughout the trip and were very helpful and obliging at all times in meeting any requests from the team. They told us later that this was their first ‘charity trip’ and really enjoyed it.

The journey gave us all time to get to know each other and share our common interests and why we had chosen to take

this journey. Dr. Mac was making this trip to offer his medical expertise in the service of the Love and Care School and to look into the possibilities of developing an ongoing MMMI Medical Mission for the Burmese community around Mae Sot. Ms. Aom, a Buddhist, was there to support Dr. Mac and be the official photographer to provide an illustrated account of the trip. Ajarn Shannon was there to learn about the water treatment facilities as this is her interest area and she would like to develop a career in this field when she returns to Chicago. Ajarn Danielle was interested in Health issues and expressed interest in Public Health on the way to Mae Sot. However, since she shadowed Dr. Mac throughout the trip and took temperatures, pulse rates and blood pressures of all the ‘patients’ we soon christened her Dr. DeeDee. Dr. Mac awarded her a stethoscope in hopes that she would consider a career in medicine or healthcare, and continue with the MMMI Missions in future (at the time of this writing she has decided to take a Master’s Degree in Nutrition). Ajarn Christina was interested in Migration issues having spent time in South Africa working with Migrants. Dr. Noel was there as an educator and happy to help in any way he could. He was also very interested in Migration issues globally, having worked in this field for over ten-years. This led to a number of surprises for him later.

Arrival at Love and Care School

We finally arrived at the Mae Sot checkpoint and were met by Nurse Htway who brought us to the school. I’m sure we must

have looked quite a sight as we arrived, all smiles but not knowing what this trip would do to us and our many ideals about life.

We went straight to the school and unloaded our supplies. We then went to the main school hall that also functioned as a classroom, where the students were all there to greet us. Boys sat on the left and the girls on the right side of the hall as we faced them. They seemed very subdued and shy, not knowing what to expect from this group of foreigners and Khun Aom. Nurse Htway introduced us all and then Dr. Noel spoke for a few minutes thanking them for their welcome and saying how happy he was to be back again in Mae Sot and hoped to see some of the students he had met last year. They soon made themselves known to Dr. Noel, who was delighted to meet them again. Of course they had also heard about Dr. Noel from the donations in December and so they could finally see who this guy was. Dr. Mac then spoke and said how happy he was to be there and hoped to help the students with their medical and overall healthcare needs. Each of the three American Ajarns then also spoke briefly to say how happy they were to be there to help out in whatever way they could.

The students then sang a Karen song of greeting and later Dr. Noel asked if they knew any Westlife songs from the Irish boy band which is very popular in both Burma and Thailand. The students then sang a Westlife song and seemed delighted to be singing in English. Two students then did a Karen dance for the Team and Dr. Noel taught them basic steps of Irish Dancing, which was fun for all as they tried to get the steps correct.

Nurse Htway then brought us all on a

tour of the school and we met Mr. David (from the U.S.) and Mr. Tarain (from the U.K.), who are presently working there as volunteer teachers. We saw their computer room, but most PCs were not web connected. We saw where the boys and girls lived in separate quarters. We explored their water supply system and their garden where they grew some vegetables for their own consumption. We saw the ‘cooking team’ in session busily preparing the evening meal. We later learnt that the students have only two meals a-day, because their budget from their Australian sponsors provides for only 60 students while there are 104 at the school. This means that the food for 60 has to be stretched to feed 104. The implications and consequences of this became very evident next day when the clinics began.



The Team with Nurse Htway at the police check-point close to the Love and care School. Left to right: Dr. Noel, A. Shannon, A. Danielle, Nurse Htway, A. Christina, Dr. Mac and Ms. Aom.

On the day we arrived, there was no water for the students. A non-profit group had recently installed a new water filtration system, however, it did not last long as it broke right after the installation. Unfortunately, no one at Love and Care had been instructed about the functioning of the system, so no one was equipped to trouble-

shoot or fix it. This is one example of the problem Ajarn Shannon keeps learning about as she researches water and sanitation issues in developing communities. The global water problem is not caused by a lack of technology or physical resources to provide clean water. It's a matter of getting the supplies to the right people, maintaining them, and, most importantly, getting the target community to know exactly how and why to use the systems. It seems that there's a chronic issue of dropping off supplies without ever teaching someone in the target community, such as Love & Care, how to operate and maintain a new system. When we arrived, the school had called a service technician, who then took two days to get there and repair the system. It was fortunately working well when we departed on the Sunday afternoon.

After the tour, we all left to go to Mae Sot and find accommodations. As Dr. Noel had to renew his Thai Visa for another three months, the team brought him to the Friendship Bridge to do so. He duly exited Thailand and walked across the bridge to Burma where he went to the immigration office and paid the Bt 500 to get a Burmese Visa. He then walked about the small town and returned across the bridge again to Thailand where he got his Passport re-stamped for another 90 days. This whole adventure took less than thirty-minutes and was very pleasant and easy. The Officials on both sides of the bridge were very warm and helpful with no fuss, hassles or queues to deal with as he had experienced in the past at the Cambodian Border at Pai Pet.

We all then went to get our accommodations sorted out. The American Ajarns all agreed to stay at the Church where they

were welcomed by the Karen Paster "Da". Dr. Mac, Ms. Aom and Dr. Noel all found a lovely comfortable guesthouse in the city close to a Temple.

Later we met up for dinner at the SP Kitchen, which is a fantastic restaurant on the main road to the Friendship Bridge that Dr. Noel had visited before. This became our preferred eating place throughout the trip and we ate there both evenings for dinner, and both mornings for breakfast.

The First Clinic and Nutrition Classes

Following breakfast at our favorite restaurant we returned to the school at 9.00am on Saturday morning. The Team was greeted by the students who put on a wonderful display of Karen group dancing. Afterwards, the team decided to split up and Dr. Mac went with Nurse Htway to set up the first medical clinic. Here Dr. Mac and Nurse Htway taught Danielle how to take blood pressures, pulse rates and temperatures, and soon she was busy doing so, with growing confidence as she went. Nurse Htway also helped in providing a small note pad to write out the temperatures, pulses and blood pressures of each student, plus a brief medical account of any ailments they might have. Dr. Mac then proceeded to meet each student one by one and did an external medical examination of each, checking their weight, height, glands, etc., for any visible signs of illnesses or injuries. Soon it became clear that many students were anemic due to an Iron Deficiency and poor diet (anemia is common in teens, because they undergo rapid growth spurts, when the body has a greater need for nutri-

ents like iron), while others had Iodine Deficiencies resulting in Thyroid conditions.

All illnesses and conditions seen and treated were largely due to very poor overall nutrition and proper medical care, as well as preventative health care, which resulted in cases of “rickets” (lack of Vitamin D, unseen in developed countries), “*pediculus capitis/humanus*” (head and body lice), and “anorexia”, as many students, especially the females, were grossly underweight; this too leading to “*dysmenorrhoea*” (painful menstruation), or “*amenorrhoea*” (an absence of menstruation). The future chances of these females carrying pregnancies to full term and/or resulting in low birth-weight rates among the infants born of these females can be very high in actual percentages.



Dr. Mac awaiting patients (students) to be called for treatment at his table.

Dr. Noel decided that the best use of his time was to teach a class on Nutrition, a subject he had taught many years ago in Canada as a Science graduate. A group of students gathered in the main hall and he proceeded with his first Nutrition class in many years. He covered the main nutrition sources from food, covering Proteins, Fats and Carbohydrates and what foods supplied

these. He also discussed Vitamins and Minerals essential for the body, and which foods contained each. The main mineral of interest to many students and especially the females was Iron, which is essential for all students, but is likely to be deficient in girls during their monthly cycle when they tend to need higher amounts of this mineral. As a twenty-five year plus vegetarian, Dr. Noel was able to talk about a balanced diet that did not rely on meat and fish for proteins, and also showed by his own health that it was possible to live a healthy life without these protein sources. He explained that he got his protein from vegetables, fruit, nuts, lentils and tofu, etc. At the time he was giving this class he was unaware of the fact that the school’s main diet is in fact vegetarian, largely due to a lack of funds to purchase meat and fish. He summarized his thoughts on nutrition with the two key words - dietary ‘Variety and Moderation’.

Following this successful class he then went on to teach a class on Brain Nutrition, involving introducing the students to the power of their “right brain”. This was done through a series of creative thinking tests, which were fun to do. He also imparted important lessons on how the right brain is necessary to resolve many problems that the left brain cannot do. The energy in the class was very high with students competing and cajoling each other to demonstrate how to solve some of the problems posed by Dr. Noel. He offered small rewards for students who correctly solved some of the problems and these ranged from Bt 20, to Bt100. There was great excitement when someone got an award. Again, Dr. Noel was not aware until much later that the students had no money of their own and so

any reward was a welcome treat for them.

Following these first classes the team went to join Dr. Mac to observe the progress of his “clinic”. They then took a lunch break and were treated to a sumptuous luncheon meal cooked by the students. We noticed as we ate that many students came by was just to observe us, which we had thought, but later realized they were more likely observing the beautiful meal spread out on the table as they had only eaten a light breakfast that morning and were probably hungry and would not eat again until that night. Dr. Noel asked what would happen to the left-over’s and was assured that these would be divided among the students. However, he resolved in his mind to do more than this for the students who had offered so much for the Team’s enjoyment (more on this later).



Dr. Noel demonstrating how to get a Bt 20 note out from under a bottle without letting it fall or touching it.

Following lunch, Dr. Noel held a second two classes on Nutrition and Brain Nutrition for other students. Some of those who had attended the morning sessions also showed up and were allowed to sit in for the first class on Nutrition, but were asked to leave for the second class, because they already knew the answers to the tests. The

fact that so many wanted to attend the nutrition class a second time suggests that they found it valuable and helpful! Between the two sessions Dr. Noel did some aerobic exercises for the students, which helped to energize them for the second session. They also found this fun and seemed to laugh a lot and were excited to be doing the exercises which included very fast ‘running on-the-spot’.

Dr. Mac and Ajarn Danielle held a second clinic for the students with the help of Nurse Htway, while Mr. Sa Shine attended the classes.

Later Dr. Mac and the Team visited the Burmese Medical Association (BMA) to discuss the feasibility of officially recognising and encouraging Dr. Mac and the MMMI Medical Missions with migrants and refugees along the border area.



Dr. Mac and the Team meeting with the BMA at their Mae Sot Office.

Sunday - Clinics and Meetings

After a busy, but very rewarding and full day at the school the Team headed back to the restaurant for a well-deserved dinner and discussion of the day’s events. Then to bed and deep sleep for all as they recharged their batteries for Sunday’s events! Sunday began with breakfast at the restau-

rant followed by a trip to the Church for another clinic. This time the ‘patients’ were children from another Burmese junior school, plus adult Burmese members from the surrounding community.

While the ‘clinic’ was in progress Dr. Noel, Ajarn Shannon, Ajarn Christina and Mr. Sa Shine went to the local market and bought a large supply of vegetables, fruits, different beans, lentils and fish for the students. These were taken back to the school by two of the teachers they met at the market. They then went to a seed store and bought packets of different seeds, including leafy green vegetables, root tubers and tomatoes. They also purchased six seed trays with soil and fertilizer to get the seeds started and germinating before planting in the garden which needed to be cleared and expanded for these new additions.

They then returned to the church to await the end of Dr. Mac’s clinic. Here Dr. Noel asked the students to sing some songs and soon a crescendo of music was ringing out from the church to the surrounding streets as the students found their voices for both Karen and church music. One of the Love and Care students, Raymond, helped Ajarn Danielle with the temperatures, pulses and blood pressures as he was interested in

a medical career as a nurse or doctor. He also spoke good English and so was able to act as interpreter for Dr. Mac and Ajarn Danielle.

Following the end of the Clinic, the Team all went to visit the local Catholic Priest, Fr. Justin, a Karen. There they met an American surgeon from California who was on one of his annual visits to work in a Burmese clinic along the border as he has done for 20 years. He was able to give us the benefit of his insight about the medical needs of Karen people in the area. Dr. Mac and the team had a discussion with this American physician regarding the reasons why they were there, and their thoughts for future possibilities of medical and healthcare missions in the area.

Following, Dr. Mac had a more detailed meeting with Fr. Justin about the feasibility of starting a MMMI Medical Mission in Mae Sot. The reason was to make all aware of the Catholic Church’s presence through the MMMI Medical Mission’s work, and its desire to be of service to “everyone” in the community, regardless of national origin or religious belief. As a result of this meeting, Fr. Justin had promised to support Dr. Mac and the MMMI’s efforts in future, and openly and caringly invited Dr. Mac and the Team back again.

While at Love and Care, Ajarn Shannon befriended and connected with the students as much as possible, learning their history and especially talking to the college and scholarship applicants about their future plans. They have so many questions. They’re so eager to learn. Not only do they need and want assistance from teachers and mentors, but they’re also ceaselessly grateful for such help.



The Team with Fr. Justin at the end of their meeting.

A fun highlight of the weekend according to Ajarn Shannon was when she traded dance lessons with some of the students. After a beautiful Karen welcome dance on Saturday morning, the large group of students and visitors scattered around the school. She spotted a small cluster of boys sitting shyly in a gazebo with a guitar, so she approached and asked to sit with them. One boy asked if he could play her a song, which of course she accepted with a huge smile on her face. Together they all sang her a beautiful song that they said was about rain falling over a river. Then they all began talking about music and dancing, and soon were taking turns teaching each other Karen dance moves and salsa/bachata dance steps. A small audience of other students gathered, and soon there were ten or twelve students in front of Ajarn Shannon, counting “1, 2, 3, HIP!” and laughing ceaselessly. For the rest of the weekend, they patiently reminded her to keep her hands strong throughout their Karen movements, and she gently helped them find the bachata beat every time they lost it. Music remains an international language of communication and relationship building across cultures. As of this writing Ajarn Shannon is again at Love and Care School teaching an Intensive English Course for those students studying for their TOEFL Test.

Aside from Love and Care, the group of volunteers visited several other places including Dr. Cynthia’s internationally-recognized Mae Tao Clinic. This clinic is... unimaginable. It’s a gravel lot dotted with both modern and dilapidated buildings. Handwritten signs indicate “Surgical Theater” and “Blood Collection”. People walk for days to the clinic for malarial treatment, amputations, and injuries sustained during raids by the Burmese military. One American volun-

teer doctor commented that he does fortunately have access to anesthesia for amputations, though then he can only provide a simple paracetamol pain-killer for post-surgical patients with freshly amputated limbs. Mae Tao Clinic is an inspirational example of how dedicated caretakers, particularly Dr. Cynthia, can stretch limited resources to help save so many lives. Yet the disparity between this facility and other properly-funded hospitals was pitiful. “It broke my heart”, according to Ajarn Shannon after the visit. Later she noted that “It is difficult to express how much I learned that weekend in Mae Sot. Such experiences are nearly impossible to encapsulate in mere words”.

Final School Meeting and the launch of the Seed Project

After this meeting the Team returned to the school for their final farewells and a few surprises. The students were delighted to see us arrive and quickly gathered in the main hall again. Dr. Noel then opened the box of bananas and distributed them to the students who were surprised, but delighted to get them. Many ate their banana immediately and those who were holding onto theirs were approached by Dr. Noel to open them and enjoy the food. They did so, and he gave out a second round of bananas to everyone’s delight. He had spoken about the high nutritional value of bananas in his earlier classes and was now ensuring with the help of the Team that everyone got a banana to eat. The Team had also contributed to the purchase of all the food supplies which he told the students about, thanking them for the wonderful lunch

on Saturday and we were now hoping they would enjoy a wonderful dinner on Sunday.

Finally, Dr. Noel gave out the six seed trays and some seed packets to each of the six school teams and explained how they should use the soil and fertilizer to start the seeds in the trays and once germinated to transplant them in their garden. He suggested that they set aside a newly cleared section of the garden for each team, and they could see who grew the best seeds and vegetables for their own consumption. This quickly became the ‘Seed Project’. Mr. Sa Shine did the interpretation for Dr. Noel and also encouraged the students to get involved in this worthwhile project. Dr. Noel also explained to Mr. David (the visiting volunteer teacher from the U.S.) what to do to get started that afternoon and said that he would be back in a few months to see how things were going in the garden. He also explained about starting a compost heap at the end of the garden, and that they should save the banana skins which would become the first organic matter to get it started. He explained that this compost heap could be used to help fertilize and provide nutrition for the soil, and in turn the soil would grow the vegetables to help support their own nutrition. This was the cycle of life.

After many farewell photos the Team said their farewells and headed back to Bangkok. There were some tears evident during this parting, for the students had made a big impression on the Team, and it was clear that the Team also had an impact on the students. As the Team travelled south they reminisced about the weekend and how enjoyable and wonderful it was. They also resolved to return again as early as March, or May if possible, to do a follow-up and

see how the garden was going and to bring some more badly needed vitamins and minerals (at the time of writing, Ajarn Shannon and Ajarn Jorge, returned to the School bringing the vitamins and minerals needed, as well as some English educational materials requested by the teachers and students for future English entrance examinations).

Presently, there are plans for Dr. Mac and the MMMI to return to Mae Sot in early May after his return from MMMI Medical Missions in Nepal in April. This would then serve as an opportunity for Dr. Mac to establish a MMMI Medical Mission in Thailand with the support of Fr. Justin and the Catholic Church, along with the recognition and encouragement of the BMA and the other groups in the surrounding area, as well as support from Dr. Mac and the MMMI’s Catholic Church Superior and sponsors in the United States.

CONCLUSION

We can see from this brief article and account of what some dedicated and compassionate Ajarns and students can do to help so many others, by just showing a little concern for them and reaching out to share their time and resources with them. The staff and students of Love and Care were an inspiration to all of those who went there, and it is our intention to continue to build on this work into the future. We welcome others to join us in this work through donations and support, and are also most welcome to visit the school themselves if they are able to do so, and perhaps volunteer to teach some classes or provide assistance to the students.